BOOK REVIEWS

Blomberg, Craig L., and Miriam J. Kamell. *James*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008. 280 pp. Hardcover, $24.99.

James is the inaugural volume in a new series of commentaries that Zondervan is spearheading. The series is intended for those who have taken at least basic Greek and who wish to have a commentary that aids in the application of the original Greek without assuming that the readers are learned scholars. Furthermore, the series intends to assist the student of the NT in interpreting the Scriptures "without getting bogged down in scholarly issues that seem irrelevant to the life of the church" (9). It is intended to be "one-stop-shopping" (13) for the pastor or teacher in his or her sermon and/or lesson preparations.

Craig Blomberg, a Professor of New Testament Studies at Denver Seminary since 1986, has published at least seventeen books and numerous articles in his area of specialty. He invited his former research assistant, Miriam Kamell, to be coauthor of this initial volume. At the time of writing, she was a Ph.D. candidate in NT studies at the University of St. Andrews, focusing on the soteriology of James.

The commentary is structurally constructed around what the authors see as three recurring themes in James: trials, wisdom, and poverty and riches. For the authors, "poverty and riches" is the dominant of the three. This three-part structure follows the approach of Peter Davids's 1982 NIGTC commentary on James. The authors reject both Martin Debelius's no-theme approach and the more contemporary discourse analysis that fits James into the rhetorical structures of Greco-Roman literature.

Following most evangelical commentators, the authors date the letter to the mid-to-late forties, with an eastern Mediterranean provenance. James is generally believed to have been written to a Christian community somewhere in Syria. However, possibly because of space or their narrowly targeted evangelical audience, the authors do not address the arguments for a later date and provenance for the epistle. In addition, they seem to dismiss out of hand the position that the author, a follower of Jesus, could be writing before the clear separation between Judaism and Christianity—thus making it a document that a follower of Jesus wrote to all Jewish people, followers and nonfollowers. Thus, for example, instead of interpreting "brothers" in 1:9 as a Christian nomenclature, James could have been using it in the same way Peter used it on the Day of Pentecost when addressing fellow Jews and God-fearers. Because of the fact that I argue elsewhere for the latter position, I thus find it a bit disconcerting that in a number of places, when using my work, the authors give the reader the impression that I argue that James is addressing only Christian believers (e.g., 69, 57-58, 110; cf. 206). One wonders if such misuse of their sources is widespread throughout the commentary! This is also evident on p. 225, where they give the impression that I could

support violent resistance by the poor against the oppression of the rich. My argument is diametrically opposite such a position.

The authors struggle to find a unifying theme in the letter, insomuch that the final discussion (and a very brief one at that) of the book has the subtitle "A Unifying Motif?" The question mark demonstrates their doubts. Could it be that in their attempts to fit the book into a neat three-part structure, they fail to recognize an overarching theme? Elsewhere I suggest "suffering" as such a motif.

Blomberg and Kamell, however, correctly realize that social action is central to James. Their recognition of James's emphasis on issues of poverty and wealth alerts us to the meaningfulness of his writing to peoples of the two-thirds or "majority" world, whose life-realities parallel James's own first-century audience. Thus, for example, while for centuries the northern European-American theologians debated the "faith-works" pericope (2:14-26) totally outside its immediate context, contemporary students of James in the Global South were quick to see James's arguments socially and contextually—a *Sitz im Leben* similar to their own experiences.

It is worthwhile to note that Blomberg and Kamell intentionally use gender-inclusive language to the point of adopting the popular oral style of using the third-person plural "they" when its antecedent is a generic singular (14). This might turn off the more "conservative" evangelical, but others in the progressive camp will celebrate it (see 154-155 for an insightful discussion regarding including women in ministry and teaching.)

Finally, the authors have selected their bibliography from primarily evangelical scholars. It might have been helpful to recognize more of the so-called "liberal" commentators in the bibliography, even if the conservative positions remain dominant because of the work's target audience.

The commentary authors are not only right on target in their exegetical and theological social interpretation, they also show great sensitivity in their application to contemporary American Christianity—especially to the marginal and oppressed in our society. Overall, this commentary provides helpful preaching material: exposition, illustrations, and anecdotes. It is an essential resource for preparing a Jacobean sermon; pastors can enhance sermons having a basis in James by taking serious consideration of the "Theology in Application" section of the passage under consideration.

Walla Walla University PEDRITO U. MAYNARD-REID
College Place, Washington

Chilton, Bruce. *Abraham's Curse: Child Sacrifice in the Legacies of the West*. New York: Doubleday, 2008. 259 pp. Hardcover, $24.95.

The author begins with the day in 1998 when a telephone call took him from home to a crime scene near his church where a young woman had died from a knife-blow to the throat. Later, during the killer's successful insanity defense, the court learned that an obscure Afro-Caribbean religious rite—involving a god, a knife, and a sacrifice—had provided motivation for the crime.